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POPULATION INFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR ECA MEMBER STATES :  
PERSPECTIVES FOR THE 1990s

## INTRODUCTION

1. When the ECA secretariat embarked on population activities in 1961, the need to generate and appropriately disseminate population information throughout the region among different potential audiences was highlighted as one of the key means to bring about a greater awareness of population issues in the region. The secretariat's efforts in this area culminated in the establishment of a regional population information network in January 1984 to specifically handle the population information dissemination issues of the region as part of a global effort to improve the flow of population information and data on both regional and worldwide basis.
2. At the present stage in Africa's development, there is need for improved data and information to be made available and accessible, and the appropriate modalities have to be instituted to ensure such accessibility in the 1990s when there should be an improved flow of, and use of population and development information by intended users of the region. Efforts so far initiated by ECA need to be considerably intensified and resources found to continually support these. It is only when this is done that the region can hope to arrive at comparable levels of awareness of population issues to those already attained by the other United Nations regional commissions where highly motivated population programmes (including intensive population information activities) have been pursued since the 1970s. For as long as Africa remains at its present primitive level of population information activities, its capability to support the regional population and development programme itself is very much compromised. Population information dissemination activities in the region have to be brought up to levels capable of meeting the challenges of the 1990s.
3. The objective of this paper is to highlight the necessary mechanisms for developing a viable regional population information programme which will enable the African region to have the facilities and services for promoting the needed awareness creation and understanding of population and development issues which will be crucial for the region in the 1990s. The paper traces in section I the state of African population/development perspectives and discusses in section II the role that population information plays in this process. The development of population information dissemination activities since 1961 are reviewed, and an analysis of the present state of affairs, including a description of major activities already implemented also given. Section III highlights the main perspectives of a regional population information programme. The major elements of the proposed programme at different levels as well as the resources needed for implementation are indicated. Specific recommendations are addressed in section IV to member States to aggressively support the information programme and for donor agencies and institutions to support ECA in its efforts to develop, sustain and further develop its indigenous regional knowledge base on population matters in a manner which ensures the region's continued sustained growth in the population and development sector.

### I. STATE OF POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN THE AFRICAN REGION

4. In order to place the region's population information concerns in proper perspective, it is important to review the population and development issues of the region which constitute the umbrella for population information activities and which themselves have undergone several transformations over the last two or three decades. In 1961, on the commencement of population activities by the Secretariat, most of the region did not perceive that Africa had any population problems to address. In fact, the ECA document "Status and prospects of population policies in ECA member States" (1989) notes that "following the attainment of political independence by the early 1960s, African countries mobilized resources and developed institutions consistent with the then prevailing conventional wisdom that economic development involves rapid increase of GNP per capita ...". (1) The preoccupation then was with economic growth indicators. By the end of the 1960s, however it became obvious that despite creditable output growth performances, the problems of poverty and unemployment were not being resolved due principally to the rapid growth rate of the populations of member States. This state of affairs had been brought about largely because of the imbalance between rapid mortality declines of the post-Second World War period and the relative non-decline in fertility levels.

5. The above realization was to lead to a transformation in the development strategy - one in which the provision of basic needs was emphasized for the 1970s. "The view was that if poverty was to be eliminated, policies and programmes should be directly aimed at providing jobs, education and health services..." (2)

Many of the affected countries responded to this shift in strategy by instituting family planning programmes in a bid to moderate the rising rates of population growth. An interesting debate subsequently ensued in which the choice "was between dissipating the available scarce resources for the provision of basic needs and family planning services (as a component of national population programmes)." (3)

6. These debates led to further shifts in strategy in the 1980s with emphasis now being placed on "peoples's participation in the development process; mobilization of community resources; and, self-reliance to provide for the basic needs at the community level. Population concerns have since then been broadened from preoccupation with fertility reduction (as in the 1970s) to concerns about morbidity and mortality, family formation and status of women, population distribution and urbanization, internal and international migration and population structure." (4)

7. The decade of the 1980s was thus marked by an integrated approach to population and development issues in the region. Member States sought to undertake research, disseminate population information and data, strengthen their technical capacity and to engage in institution-building in an effort to integrate population factors into their development planning activities. However, since these efforts were undertaken in a rather *ad hoc* fashion and not appropriately coordinated or institutionalized within national development plans and structures, the overall desired objectives of effecting declines in fertility and subsequent reductions in population growth so as to eliminate poverty, unemployment and inequality could not be attained. The process of integrating population and development planning issues during the 1970-1980 decade will appear therefore, to have been hampered by a lack of understanding of the integration process, inadequate data and information, insufficient research, lack of trained and experienced personnel and limited awareness among planners and policy-makers on the interrelationships between population and development. These, then, are the needs yet to be addressed by member States in the 1990s.

8. While much positive change has occurred in government attitudes since the adoption of the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population (KPA) in 1984, concern now is with the effective implementation of national population programmes intended to resolve some of the outstanding issues identified above. Countries now recognize the need to institute integrated population and development programmes in a bid to resolve their socio-economic development problems which continue to hamper their efforts to relinquish poverty and ensure sustainable development and growth at the national level. This positive development in attitudes is reflected in the number of African countries which have formally adopted national population policies as part of the strategy to address their development and population issues. The present figures indicate a total of 23.

9. Nonetheless, the mechanisms for bringing about the needed integration of population into development planning have yet to be mastered by member States. It is in the bid to provide the needed backing for implementing appropriate new strategies to attain the goals of integration that ECA, at the dawn of the 1990s, articulated measures to be taken by member States in the paper entitled "Population issues for ECA member States during the 1990s". (5) Endorsed by the ECA Conference of Ministers at its sixteenth session in 1990, the strategies call for specific actions to be implemented in five priority areas, namely socio-economic development and national population programmes; studies on population dynamics; integration of population variables and policies in development planning; data collection, training and research; and information dissemination. The paper calls on ECA member States to implement the recommended actions within their overall development strategy formulation. It is to be noted that the fifth priority area for attention in the 1990s is given as population information dissemination.

## II. POPULATION INFORMATION ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### A. What is population information?

10. Since population information connotes different concepts to different audiences, it is important to define what the field is expected to cover. It is generally agreed that population information is concerned with the data and literature pertaining to demographic factors. The core area of knowledge that population information seeks to cover was actually defined by the Technical Task Force (TTF) (set up by the United Nations in 1976 to examine the need for a world-wide population information system) (6) as population data (that is, census and vital data) needed for measuring population structure, growth, trends and movements. It is this basic demographic data, together with the literature in which they are presented and analyzed, and in which the methodology used to supplement and interpret them is elaborated, which constitute the area which population information attempts to cover.

11. However, since other social and economic concerns impinge on this field, there is the increasing tendency to broaden the coverage of population information to cover more than the original basic demographic data and literature in order to cover population dynamics and related themes, dependent on the specific needs of countries. In the African region, where basic demographic data may be defective or even non-existent for some countries, recourse is increasingly made to identifying alternative sources of literature and documentation relating to the demographic profiles of member States in an effort to assemble some basic data and information for measuring population structure, size, composition, etc. The prevailing interests and needs in an ever-increasing number of African countries to implement population and development integration programmes require to be supported by more strengthened population information activities capable of generating, assembling, processing and disseminating the basic data and literature pertinent to these interests and needs.

12. These needs are, however, diversified and are subjected to change dependent on the concerns and developmental strategies pursued by respective countries. Therefore, while population information is concerned with the organization and dissemination of demographic data and the literature pertaining to them, the limits of the field will obviously be determined by individual national and regional needs. Consequently, while some countries may concentrate on family planning programmes and thus require data and information pertaining to such concerns, others may reckon urbanization and migration as their areas of interest and thus prefer to assemble data and literature on these themes.

### B. The role of population information

13. In the ECA document referred to above outlining strategies for the 1990s, the following is noted about population information dissemination: "Success in integrating population factors into development planning depends upon creating an awareness of population problems at different levels of decision-making ... In this regard, a strategy should be instituted, if not already done, to strengthen existing population information, education and communication (IEC) programmes. Such programmes should be institutionalized so as to provide a continuous chain for collecting, processing and disseminating population information and messages relevant to population and development interrelationship within the overall national population programme". (7)

14. The role of population information in ECA's subprogramme on population was highlighted way back in 1979 in ECA resolution 366 (XIV) on integrated programmes on population, which requested the Executive Secretary "as part of the efforts for the creation of better awareness of population issues and their applications for socio-economic development, to expand and improve the activities of the secretariat in the field of population information and documentation in order to give better service including training in this field to the countries of the region." ECA resolution 400 (XV) of 1981 on priority population programmes of ECA further requested the Executive Secretary "to intensify the Commission's activities in the field of

population dissemination and documentation." The spirit of these resolutions was subsequently echoed in the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), generally regarded as the blueprint for Africa's development from 1980 up to the year 2000, which had stated that "any population programme attempting to improve the quality of life should stand on a firm knowledge base that cover the most important social, economic and demographic factors related to the family." (8)

15. It was against this backdrop that the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action (KPA) also stipulated in 1984 specific actions to be taken to address the population information issues of the region. Among the four recommendations on population information is one which exhorts member States to "develop appropriate mechanisms for disseminating available demographic data to researchers, policy-makers, project officers and the general public. Countries should ensure that available demographic data are summarized and presented in forms that are easily understood by all sections of the population. Countries should strive to set up population information networks which provide an empirical base for project formulation, implementation and evaluation." (9)

16. It should be noted again that the call to ECA member States to address their population and development problems by instituting appropriate structures to resolve them (e.g., development of national population policies and programmes, etc.), also carries with it the inherent message that appropriate national channels for developing the national population knowledge base should be instituted as it serves as a crucial linkage in this developmental effort. This is in order, as it has been clearly demonstrated that successful population programmes rely on good population information, IEC programmes for their effectiveness. This explains, for example, why the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the largest funding agency in the area of population, puts a high premium on IEC activities and has placed them at the centre of its African strategy for assistance (1987). (10)

#### C. Implementation of population information activities since 1961

17. The ECA secretariat had been, and still is, motivated by the need to institute and develop long-term indigenous regional capacity, capable of ensuring sustainable development and growth of the information resources of the region. These efforts, perceived as part of a continuing process to develop appropriate regional structures and linkages will eventually provide a strong foundation for a regional knowledge base whose development itself is very much a function of the total development effort of the region as a whole. Developments in the area of population information dissemination in the African region fall under four developmental phases which are now described briefly below in order to indicate the progressive chain linking strategies and activities to date:

##### 1. Phase I (1961-1976)

18. This phase corresponds to the stage when the ECA secretariat was beginning to develop its population activities. Information dissemination was conceived as part of this overall development, but information activities undertaken were largely ad hoc in nature. A small reference unit was developed for the Population Programme Centre (as the Population Division was then called) and the dissemination activities consisted of the distribution to member States of the technical reports and studies produced by the Centre. The World Population Plan of Action (WPPA)(11) of 1974 which recommended that efforts were to be intensified to improve the flow of population information and data, added impetus to these initial efforts at information dissemination at the Centre which, from 1970, had started producing the African Population Newsletter, as a disseminating tool to report on population activities in the region.

##### 2. Phase 2 (1976-1983)

19. In 1976, the Centre attained the status of a full-fledged Population Division. With infrastructural support from UNFPA, the population information dissemination activities were subsequently expanded in

line with the recommendations of a UNFPA evaluation which, in 1978, had urged the provision of adequate information and clearing-house activities in order to create awareness of population issues in Africa so as to assist the economic and social development planning of governments. In its 1979 project proposal, the Division appropriately requested additional resources from UNFPA to strengthen the dissemination activities. Two staff posts were granted plus minimal funds to engage in some clearing-house activities for the distribution of the population information materials of the Division (technical reports and papers) throughout the region. The production of the African Population Newsletter was continued, and the first issue of the African Directory of Demographers was produced in 1978 in response to the needs of the African Conference of Demographers.

20. Influenced by other developments at the global level, namely the establishment of a global Population Information Network (POPIN) with headquarters within the Population Division (DIESA, New York), ECA started moves to establish a regional node of the global POPIN. In 1982, ECA called the first Consultative Meeting of POPIN-Africa in Addis Ababa at which participants endorsed the need to establish the Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa). In 1983, the second POPIN-Africa Consultative Meeting was held in New York to discuss the initial project proposal for POPIN-Africa and to sort out funding arrangements for the three year project. Attending that meeting were representatives from UNFPA, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Ottawa, Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and USAID. Also represented were the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS), the Institut de formation et de recherche démographiques (IFORD), the Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC), the Sahel Institute and the Pan-African Development Information System (PADIS). Following the meeting, UNFPA agreed to fund the Coordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa while the IDRC indicated its willingness to assist RIPS, IFORD, CDC and the Sahel Institute to develop as components of the new regional network.

### 3. Phase 3 (1984-1987)

21. In January 1984 therefore, the new project POPIN-Africa was inaugurated with the long-term objectives of establishing "a network comprised of major population information services in Africa, which will provide ways of improving the flow of population information among institutions and organizations dealing with population related activities in Africa"; and "assisting in developing appropriate population information infrastructures in member States through advisory services including the training of librarians and documentalists for the collection, processing and dissemination of population information". (12)

22. The highlights of activities implemented during this phase under the POPIN-Africa project include:

(a) Efforts at regional networking which led to the organization of a training seminar/workshop on POPIN-Africa methodologies for input/output mechanisms, organized in Addis Ababa in 1986 for network members;

(b) The provision of documentation and referral services with the creation of a computerized regional database of bibliographic references and data established by the project in 1985, and maintained with inputs from the Coordinating Unit and the network's subregional/sectoral participating centres. This database, which represents the only indigenous regional population information database attempting to pull together the non-numerical information of relevance to the African region is used to generate the project's bibliographic journal of abstracts and indexes called POPINDEX-Africa, now in its sixth edition. Another database recently installed at the Coordinating Unit endeavours to store supplementary information on all pertinent population information which can be extracted from several external sources enabling POPIN-Africa to direct users' requests to appropriate sources and institutions both within and outside the region. The production of the monthly current awareness listing, Scanning Sheet (started in 1985), which comprises information of new population literature acquired at the Coordinating Unit has proved very useful to the user

clientele in the region in identifying pertinent source information on population literature needed to enable member States progressively develop appropriate documentation activities and national information knowledge bases;

(c) The initiation of a special programme called POPIN-Africa duplicates programme (POP-AF DUPS) in 1985 aimed at the re-distribution to African institutions and other interested persons of duplicate population documentation collected by the project, has contributed to the marked increase in the level of mailing and distribution of various population literature and documentation currently in the region;

(d) The project also inaugurated in 1986, the POPIN-Africa Country Bibliography Series in an effort to inventory the population information resources of ECA member States. So far, annotated country bibliographies, compiled by national experts and institutions have been prepared for Kenya (No. 1), the Sahel (No. 2), Ghana (No. 3), Ethiopia (No. 4) and Rwanda (No. 5). Still under preparation are bibliographies for Cameroon and Zimbabwe. These bibliographies have been found useful reference tools for alerting African researchers and policy-makers about available population literature;

(e) The Coordinating Unit prepared in 1986 and later revised in 1989 the Guidelines for the bibliographic description and analysis of population and family planning materials in Africa for the use of its network members in order to facilitate and standardize the processing of population information materials.

#### 4. Phase 4 (1988-1991)

23. This phase marked the period when UNFPA, for the first time, approved funding of the POPIN-Africa project for four consecutive years (1988-1991). This had been done largely in recognition of UNFPA's own general satisfaction with the orientation and implementation of the project. While there was still much to be done to get national level activities operational, it was, nonetheless recognized that steady and continuing progress was being made in the implementation of the project. In fact, the approved work plan for the period envisioned an expansion in staffing and other resources for the project. Two additional professional posts were approved, thus placing at the disposal of the project, additional means to attain some of its set goals, namely to develop an integrated population information and documentation network for ECA member States in order to improve the flow of population information within the region, and to serve as a channel for providing vital population information support to policy-makers, planners, researchers and the like so as to create a greater awareness of population issues and facilitate their integration into socio-economic development plans. (13)

24. Some of the major activities implemented during this phase include:

(a) The organization of a Round-table Encounter on the dissemination of information on population issues among African journalists and media personnel. This Encounter, which took place in Dakar, Senegal, in 1988 was jointly hosted by PANA. Increasingly, the Coordinating Unit has been involving the African media and press in its efforts to disseminate public information in the region. An example of this effort was the meeting of the POPIN-Africa Working Group on Population Information Dissemination and Diffusion (PAWID) which the Coordinating Unit convened in 1989 to bring together population experts, mass communication experts and educators, population information and documentation specialists, etc., to discuss common problems related to population information dissemination in the African region;

(b) Close contacts have also been forged with the Union of National Radio and Television Organizations in Africa (URTNA) and the Union of African Population Studies (UAPS). Useful contacts are being maintained with the IPPF-Africa Region in order to have a channel to serve the population information needs of the family planning associations belonging to the IPPF-Africa Region;

(c) Improvements have been made in the publication activities of the project, both in terms of quality and quantity. This has thus made it possible for the Coordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa to more successfully engage in effective dissemination and distribution activities. The African Population Newsletter, published in English and French, now has wider coverage of African population concerns, highlighting in each issue, themes of urgent interest to the region. Feature articles dealing with special population-related issues are also now being produced on an ad hoc basis, aimed at informing the press and general African public about population issues. Since 1990, and in response to needs expressed by an increasingly interested African media for information about population and development issues, the project has also attempted to expand its activities in order to provide population information packages with the press and media needs in mind. POPIN-Africa is thus gradually becoming a major reference point for both technical and public information on population. A press clippings file and an accompanying new database have been developed, containing pertinent press-related information for use by the African media to write up stories, features, etc., pertinent to population issues in Africa. All these are being done in an effort to arouse consciousness about population issues;

(d) Much has also been done to facilitate access of potential users in the region to population information materials through expansion in the several institutional and individual listings maintained by the project. The current size of mailings undertaken by the project is now over 16,000 compared to only 1,900 in 1983;

(e) With the establishment of additional two new databases, the clearing-house activities have been further improved. The database on experts in African demography and population studies, has been used to generate the publication African Directory of Demographers. The other database, containing information on population-related institutions, programmes and projects in Africa will be used to generate a source-book, Inventory of population institutions, programmes and projects in Africa, scheduled for publication in 1991;

(f) Efforts to stimulate interest in population issues and also to sensitize potential users to the use of the project's publications and services are periodically conducted. Book exhibitions and database demonstrations have been organized whenever possible, to coincide with major conferences and meetings in the region. A recent example was in 1990 at the last ECA Conference of Ministers of Planning and Economic Development held in Tripoli, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya at which the project's databases were demonstrated;

(g) Currently, the Coordinating Unit is preparing a Handbook on the implementation of national population information centres in Africa which will help guide those member States interested in establishing national population information centres (NPICs) as a means of better organizing their national population data and literature.

#### D. Structure

25. As of now, the foundations of a regional network have been put in place with six subregional/sectoral participating centres (located in Accra, Arusha, Bamako, Cairo, Nairobi and Yaounde), and a Coordinating Unit located at the ECA secretariat in the Population Division. The work of the network is overseen by the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee which meets on a biennial basis and whose work is supported by two working groups, namely POPIN-Africa Technical Working Group (PAT) which meets once every year; and the POPIN-Africa Working Group on Population Information Dissemination and Diffusion (PAWID), which meets on an ad hoc basis. At the national level, plans are in place to establish national participating centres (NPICs) but, as of now, there are no operational national nodes. The Coordinating Unit, however, collaborates with several national institutions. Recently at the third session (1990) of the Advisory Committee of the network, a decision was taken to institute another level of membership namely, associate membership in order to pull into the network, libraries, documentation centres and similar organs

in order to offer an additional channel for linkage and dissemination of population information and data in the region.

26. At the global level, POPIN-Africa constitutes the African regional node of the global Population Information Network (POPIN), instituted by the United Nations in 1979 as a decentralized network for the co-ordination of regional, national and non-governmental population information activities in order to facilitate the flow and exchange of population information and data on a world-wide base. At the inter-regional level, it collaborates closely with its counterpart regional networks in Asia (Asia-Pacific POPIN), Latin America (DOCPAL/IPALCA), the Middle East (the proposed PAPIN of the Arab League) and systems such as POPLINE (USA), the most comprehensive computerized bibliographic information system. At the regional level, POPIN-Africa bibliographic referral database forms part of the complementary files (PADIS-Com) of PADIS.

#### E. Resources

27. The funding of population information activities in the region had been on an ad hoc basis until 1984 when UNFPA approved funds for three years for the implementation of the POPIN-Africa project. This had been done within the context of the funding arrangements agreed to in New York at the meeting of the second POPIN-Africa Consultative Committee at which UNFPA, IDRC, CIDA (Canada), USAID and other interested agencies were represented. It will be recalled that UNFPA agreed to fund the Coordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa (located at the ECA secretariat), as well as national centres in member States (when these would be developed). It was expected that ECA would provide the necessary technical backstopping for the development of these centres while actual funding for the national level operations would be subsumed within national population programmes funded by UNFPA through its country offices.

28. POPIN-Africa is presently facing problems with the funding of its activities, particularly at the Coordinating Unit level. In 1988, UNFPA approved funds for implementing Coordinating Unit activities for four years; that is, up to the end of 1991 when the current phase will end. However, UNFPA has now approved funds for only six months of this last year of the current phase. This has put in serious jeopardy, the smooth implementation of the 1991 work programme, duly approved in October 1990 by the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee at its third session held in Accra, Ghana. Additional to endorsing that the POPIN-Africa project should be continued, the Advisory Committee had approved the 1991 work plan and recommended among others, that:

(a) The subregional and sectoral participating centres of the Network should be adequately equipped to carry out their responsibilities as members of the network;

(b) Follow-up should be made towards the establishment of national population information centres (NPICs) and that ECA should encourage governments to establish national focal points for POPIN-Africa;

(c) The Coordinating Unit should take steps to expand activities adopting new technologies in information processing and utilization. It was also to forge closer collaboration and cooperation between ECA and the OAU in activities in the field of population information dissemination in Africa.

29. With the considerably reduced 1991 budget, only routine activities and a considerably reduced work programme can be implemented or maintained in 1991. Even after further discussions between ECA and UNFPA on the matter, it is unsure if the project will be funded beyond June 1991. UNFPA has requested that a users needs survey be conducted, and for its consultant to assist in preparing a new project proposal for 1992-1995 but whether, after all this, funding can be assured beyond 1992 is a matter of conjecture at this stage.

30. The funding of national level activities falls within the purview or jurisdiction of UNFPA country offices. When the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee recommended at its second session in 1987 that NPICs should be developed at the rate of two centres per year, it had been expected that the funding of these centres would form part of the funding of IEC components within existing national population programmes funded by UNFPA. Though the POPIN-Africa Coordinating Unit has assisted in assessing the national population information needs and requirements and in preparing project proposals for Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Senegal, Nigeria, Zaire and Rwanda, none of the countries has as yet managed to secure funds from UNFPA or other funding sources for their POPIN-Africa related activities.

31. Within the same framework of shared financing arrangements, the IDRC had committed itself in 1983 to fund the operations of the subregional centres of the POPIN-Africa network. The CDC, IFORD and RESADOC (of the Sahel Institute) were subsequently supported by the IDRC to develop/strengthen their documentation-related activities as part of the overall development of POPIN-Africa. RIPS was unsuccessful in securing funds from the IDRC owing to changes in IDRC policy for funding population activities. The Centre for the African Family Studies (CAFS) (a POPIN-Africa sectoral participating centre) however, continues to enjoy some funding support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

32. As of now, however, IDRC funding has ceased for the three centres it supported. Since the parent institutions to which the centres belong are themselves experiencing precarious funding problems, it has not been possible for the direct costs relating to the implementation of POPIN-Africa activities at these centres to be borne by the institutes themselves. Some of the centres are thus in a very pitiable state regarding computer hardware equipment, books and population documents, personnel and other office equipment such as photocopiers needed to enable them to modernize their facilities and offer better services and support to their immediate clientele, the network and other users in the region, as originally planned.

33. From the foregoing, it is obvious that if the present precarious funding of the network components persist, it will become impossible to execute the regional population information network. The momentum for population programmes is accelerating in member States and the population information component should not be allowed to slow down this pace simply because there are inadequate resources to ensure continued implementation of the regional information network which will ensure population information and data for these countries. In fact, over the last year, a number of African countries have indicated their preparedness to set up national population information centres or to upgrade existing facilities to national nodes of the POPIN-Africa network. Examples of such countries are Cameroon, the Gambia, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zaire. As already indicated, Africa is lagging behind its regional counterparts in Asia and Latin America where successful regional population information programmes have been executed since the early 1970s leading to high levels of awareness of population issues in those regions.

#### F. Assessment of activities undertaken and impact so far made

34. 'An assessment of what has been achieved so far under the auspices of the POPIN-Africa project is best summed up in the report of a recent UNFPA independent evaluation team of experts which evaluated the project in July 1990. The assessment states as follows: "since its establishment in 1984, POPIN-Africa has achieved a commendable measure of success... The Coordinating Unit is now in a good position to build on its record of documentation activities, computerization, publications, information dissemination and network development. To its credit, the project has already achieved some degree of visibility in several of the countries visited by the mission, especially in anglophone Africa...". (14) This assessment by a group of independent experts bears good testimony to the efforts so far put into implementing a regional population information network.

35. Encouraging results have already begun to emerge as borne out by the increasing number of ECA member States which have formally requested participation in the network. Another indication of the impact

of ongoing population information dissemination activities is the volume of requests emanating from individuals (researchers, planners) and institutions in Africa for the publications, documentation services and assistance in training in information handling techniques. As noted in an earlier paragraph, the Coordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa is now making over 16,000 mailings to interested users annually. At an increasing rate, some of the agencies involved in aspects of information dissemination in the region have closely liaised with the regional network in an effort to learn more about each other's activities and to share information and data, as necessary. Examples are UNESCO/BREDA (for population education and communication), UAPS, an association of population professionals in Africa), IPPF/Africa Region and the Association of Chief Executives of Family Planning Associations in Africa (ACEFPA), PANA and URTNA.

#### G. The existing gaps

36. Despite the record of positive achievements, there are gaps which have to be filled if the region is to attain its goals in population information dissemination. The major identified gaps over the period include:

##### 1. Establishment/development of national level activities

37. Though much preparatory work has been done in at least six member States of the ECA (Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Zaire), progress towards the actual operationalization of NPICs has been extremely slow. This problem should be addressed in all its seriousness since the effective dissemination of population information within the African region cannot be attained without operational national nodes.

38. Unfortunately, member States themselves have contributed to this state of affairs. It will appear that several member States are lethargic to the development of national population information facilities, centres, etc. Not much sustained interest and commitment has been demonstrated to incorporate the development of national population information knowledge bases and information systems into the implementation of national population programmes. Even in countries where population IEC programmes are in place, emphasis is largely placed on education and communication and population information continues to be the orphan.

39. Yet population education itself, whose *raison-d'être* is to assist in promoting better understanding and awareness of the nature, determinants and consequences of population processes and changes as well as the social implications of the population phenomena, among in-school and out-of school audiences, requires a solid base of the relevant national population data and literature which can aid this educational process. Population communication on the other hand, incorporates a range of activities which are aimed at presenting pertinent population information and data in appropriate messages and packages necessary to bring about attitudinal changes at both individual and societal levels. The use of the media is increasingly employed to aid this communication process which cannot be meaningfully and effectively pursued without appropriate base population data and information on respective countries.

40. It should be obvious therefore that population information is the source from which the attendant activities in population education and communication should draw. The three elements of IEC constitute a natural continuum and so more attention should also be directed to develop population information activities as part of the core supports for the successful execution of population IEC programmes in the region. Without the development of strong national population information knowledge bases, population education and communication programmes throughout the region will be severely handicapped since their information base will be very weak.

41. Provisions already exist for the implementation of effective IEC programmes and activities within all the emerging national population programmes and policies. More commitment, attention and resources

to the information sector will help member States to have the essential supports for the monitoring and evaluation activities to be implemented as part of their population/development integration programmes. Should member States articulate their needs for the development of national population information knowledge base/centres within such programmes, the funding of these activities could be subsumed under the existing structures for the implementation of population programmes. Accordingly, member States should begin seriously to address the question of population information (as part of IEC) and devise mechanisms for its institutionalization within ongoing programmes and projects. ECA will, of course continue to provide the needed technical backstopping for developing such national population information facilities.

## 2. Training and skills development

42. The needs in this area are critical to improving skills in population information handling capabilities and to producing a sufficiently trained corps which can deliver efficient services to the user clientele in the region. Training is still required in basic and advanced documentation, information networking skills, and also in technical writing and repackaging. Skills in computerization and in the application of advanced new information technologies to population information handling also need to be imparted on a progressive basis. The acquisition of these skills will eventually enable personnel of the network at the national, subregional and regional levels to clearly perceive and analyze problems and institute new forms of information service in order to meet new and emerging user demands in the region. Over time, specialized skills in the repackaging of population information and data to suit an ever-increasing clientele of planners, policy-makers, researchers and the general public will be required. The region at the moment lacks trained personnel (both in quantity and quality) who can identify, collect, process and disseminate the expected increased volume of population information and data needed at the national level to support the population and development integration programmes. The provision of training and skills development had been underscored as one of the recommendations of the KPA in order to develop, over time, a corps of trained personnel for the region. Intensified efforts should therefore be made now to fill this gap.

## III. POPULATION INFORMATION PERSPECTIVES OF THE 1990s: THE CHALLENGES

43. In the preceding paragraphs, the several transformations undergone by the region over the last decades have been highlighted. Taking off from the 1980s, and strengthened by the new positive attitudes of member States, the 1990s should prove a challenging decade during which a more dynamic, comprehensive and well-coordinated population information programme could be developed to serve as the effective information and communication arm of the overall regional population programme. In this new era, when the formulation and implementation of comprehensive population policies are expected to be on the ascendancy, an increased role for population information could help to stimulate and bring policy-makers and development planners to a new level of awareness and understanding of the implications that population issues have on the development planning process at the national level.

44. As of now, the basic foundations of a regional population information network have been laid. This, along with other identified population information resources (including population communication programmes) in the region, could be streamlined to better serve the region's needs within a more co-ordinated regional information programme. In order to rationalize the development of the proposed programme, the following should be taken into serious consideration:

(a) The necessity to consolidate and expand current POPIN-Africa operations in order to better assist actual and potential users in governmental, institutional, university and other sectors to obtain the population information that they need for their work;

(b) Consolidate gains already made by the POPIN-Africa project in order to further expand the regional information knowledge base and develop additional databases, as needed, to create increased

capacity to collect, organize, repackage and disseminate population information at national, subregional and regional levels;

(c) Necessity to make more concerted efforts to develop national population knowledge bases in ECA member States;

(d) Urgent need for training to upgrade the technical skills and expertise of the manpower responsible for managing the network's operations at different levels. The preparation of guides, manuals, handbooks should constitute a major feature of the training effort;

(e) Necessity to cultivate a user corps in a wide variety of governmental, commercial, media, grass-roots and other institutions for which up-to-date population information and data is, or should be, an input in their work;

(f) Need to reduce duplication of effort by actively collaborating with other agencies involved in population information dissemination in the region (e.g., UNESCO/BREDA, UNFPA country offices, etc.). The goal of regional indigenous capacity-building should not be compromised through such collaboration, especially with agencies outside the African region which could assist such development subregional centres of excellence should be closely involved, and their resources and facilities utilized to strengthen the proposed population information programme.

#### A. Strategy

45. Against the above considerations, therefore, the proposed PIPA will comprise the following programme elements:

(a) Documentation, information handling and clearinghouse;

(b) Publications and public information;

(c) Training and advisory services in population information;

(d) A regional population information network (POPIN-Africa) (the foundations for this have already been laid by the POPIN-Africa project and this could be used to serve as the nucleus for any further required actions).

46. The overall strategy is intended to re-formulate present activities, institute new structures or link up with other operational activities/projects/programmes in the African region to ensure the effective implementation of the regional population information programme. The specific activities to be implemented as part of this strategy will be worked out at a later stage in consultation with interested agencies and institutions which could facilitate the attainment of the goals of the programme. In the long run, the strategy will allow for the linkage in a regional network of the separate country activities in the area of population information in a manner which makes information-sharing a viable and profitable proposition for Africa. The development of this regional information network will constitute one of the major means to attain the overall goal of the programme, that is to improve the flow of population information and data in the region. Full advantage will be taken of new improvements in information technology and transfer to develop an efficient regional knowledge-base of relevance to the African region. A Population Information Unit will be established within the Population Division of ECA to facilitate the implementation of the regional information programme.

## B. Structure and functions

47. For the programme's effective implementation, it is foreseen that separate, custom-made, but complementary activities will be undertaken at the national, subregional and regional levels. An indication of the three-tier structure of the programme and some of the intended activities are described briefly below:

### 1. At the national level

48. The national level, which will constitute the key building block in the overall regional programme, will comprise sub-units or focal points made up of national population planning units, university population programmes, statistical offices, libraries and documentation centres and other similar institutions at the national level. Each interested member State will be expected to develop a structure/mechanism/ or linkages which will enable it to collect, process and disseminate the national information and data on population issues for the purpose of creating the national knowledge base. As much as possible these national knowledge bases should be closely linked to, or be integrated into existing or planned IEC programmes in order to constitute a comprehensive package of information services to member States.

49. The Population Information Unit at ECA will help the national focal point(s) or units to organize themselves, and to pull together their total resources so as to consolidate over time a national network. The eventual structure and linkages for each national operation will, however, be determined by the national exigencies, characteristics and needs of each country. Close liaison will be maintained with the UNFPA country offices and the central coordinating bodies for population affairs in member States.

50. Among the functions to be performed by the national information centres are disseminating bibliographic information (including the collection and processing of information) by liaising closely with national bodies which generate/analyze population data and information, identifying sources of, processing population information, promoting the sharing of numerical data (where available), generation of users, providing technical assistance and training for collaborating units, and promoting the use of the facilities of the centre/network. Depending on the level of infrastructural development of member States, national networks could take considerable time to evolve.

### 2. At the subregional level

51. Units at the subregional level will be promoted to serve as major catalysts to facilitate the formation of national units/ centres/networks. Their main functions relating to the establishment of national level operations will include the provision of training through subregional or sector-specific training workshops; visiting countries in their subregions to provide technical assistance and general guidance in the creation and operation of national centres/networks; disseminating bibliographic information and data at the subregional level; and serving as a liaison between the national and regional components of the overall regional programme and network.

52. Over time, as the national components of the regional network themselves develop and become stronger, the subregional centres could become focal points for re-organizing the national centres/networks into special interest networks of direct relevance to the work of the subregion in a manner which promotes sub-regional cooperation and development. The role of ECA's Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) located in ECA's five subregions will be useful since they can also serve as additional buttresses at the subregional level. The existing documentation facilities at some of the subregional training institutions (e.g., RIPS, IFORD, etc.) will be further expanded and modernized to serve as inputs into the regional programme, as they have been doing, as of now. However, such subregional developments will take a while to evolve since they largely depend on the readiness of individual national centres and units to "network". The network coordination of 51 member States is an arduous task, hence the early development of subregional groupings would be encouraged as part of the overall strategy.

### 3. At the regional level

53. PIPA will be executed by the ECA Population Information Unit which will be responsible for coordinating the activities to be implemented within the programme. The major functions of the Population Information Unit will be comprised of developing and maintaining regional population information referral files covering special interest areas (population literature and data, population experts, institutions, projects/programmes, etc.); producing and distributing population information materials of interest to identified users of the region; and serving as the coordinator and regional focal point for the regional population information network (POPIN-Africa) ensuring its development into a network capable of meeting the region's needs.

54. The Unit will accordingly link with other agencies and institutions, both within and outside the region, to facilitate the successful implementation of PIPA. In this context, it is foreseen that close collaboration will be sought with UNESCO/BREDA (engaged in population education activities in the region); with URTNA and PANA, both engaged in communication activities in the region; with professional groups in the region such as UAPS and similar bodies engaged in professional population-related activities in the region, which could utilize the outputs and services provided through the programme. In particular, efforts will be made to link up with UNESCO/BREDA where a regional clearinghouse for IEC activities is expected to be developed. This will ensure maximum cooperation between the present population information activities of ECA and the proposed complementary ones in IEC under development at UNESCO/ BREDA. The Unit will also maintain collaboration links with global POPIN to strengthen the region's population information activities.

#### C. Resources and time-table for the phased development of the programme

55. In order to effectively implement the programme outlined above, adequate and continuing resources have to be made available. ECA will have to seriously consider absorbing some of the costs of implementing the regional information programme under its regular budget allocations, on a progressive basis. This will not only ensure that core programme activities continue uninterrupted, but also that this information component is duly incorporated into the Population Division's work programme, of which it forms a part. Equally, ECA member States should call upon agencies like UNFPA, IDRC, USAID, CIDA and other donor agencies and countries to help provide needed extra-budgetary resources on multilateral and bilateral basis to support PIPA.

56. However, apart from the funds which will be required to implement the programme, an equally crucial input to ensuring a successful programme will be the commitment on the part of member States themselves to support the goals of the programme, conscious of the fact that the region needs such a programme to strengthen the realization and effectiveness of its regional population and development aspirations in the 1990s and beyond.

57. In order to ensure the successful restructuring and smooth transition from the present project activities of POPIN-Africa to a progressively full-fledged information subprogramme within the ECA regional population programme, the following steps and time-table are recommended:

#### 1. Preparatory phase (July - December 1991)

58. A minimum period of six months will be required to make preparatory arrangements towards the conversion of the present POPIN-Africa Coordinating Unit into a regular unit within the ECA Population Division. This unit, namely the Population Information Unit, will be supervised by a chief of unit, who will oversee the overall coordination and implementation of the planned activities connected with the development of the regional population information programme. The work of the unit will be under the direction of the Chief of the Population Division. While ECA takes over the cost of the chief of the new Population

Information Unit and one or two support staff (one secretary and one documentation/research assistant), multilateral and bilateral donors will be approached to support the implementation of identified elements of the programme, as already spelt out under A. above.

59. A new comprehensive project proposal or separate proposals will be developed during this preparatory phase aimed at mobilizing the needed resources to implement the three components of PIPA. Temporary resources will be required to pay for the present staff and to continue with operations (preparation of newsletters, bibliographies, directories, databases, training, etc.) during this preparatory phase pending such time that PIPA could be fully launched in 1992. Without such measures, there will be serious disruptions to planned operations which will not only affect the take-off for the programme, but also frustrate users in the region who require these outputs and services for their work in development planning.

## 2. Initial phase (1992-1993)

60. Following the re-structuring and the reorganization of present operations which would have taken place during the preparatory phase (six months), this biennium will concentrate efforts on the following

### (a) Documentation, information handling and clearinghouse

61. The present documentation activities (including computerization, introduction of information technology developments for information handling, etc.) will be pulled together, strengthened and properly coordinated so as to better support documentation and information handling operations of member States participating in the regional programme and network. The projected expansion in population documentation and clearinghouse activities of the programme will be planned in a manner flexible enough to accommodate the realistic levels of development of information handling and infrastructures in the region. The Reference Centre, currently operated by the POPIN-Africa Coordinating Unit will be expanded and structured as the Regional Population Documentation Centre (RPDC) serving the literature and information needs of population-related institutions, libraries, documentation centres dealing with population information in Africa. RPDC's role will be crucial to the further expansion and development of bibliographic databases and the establishment of appropriate special, referral databases to serve the emerging needs of the region.

62. Intensified users' services, closely linked with national and subregional operations, will be pursued to ensure that adequate documents back-up is provided for the national centres/networks. A mechanism will be instituted to facilitate the process of answering users' requests at all levels of the programme in order to avoid duplication and maximize resources. Information packages (on diskettes and other electronic formats) will be made available to interested users. Appropriate guides to literature and sources of information and similar aides to assist the different categories of users in the region will be prepared and utilized to encourage better use of available population literature and data among target audiences. Resources needed for implementing this component of the programme will include one documentation specialist, one population information officer (users), one assistant documentation officer and requisite sub-professional, technical and support staff (to assist with development of databases (both bibliographic and numerical), technical processing of documents, indexing, abstracting, data entry and related functions).

63. Extrabudgetary resources from interested donors will be sought to cover the costs of documentation, information handling and clearinghouse services. Dependent on the volume of the resources mobilized, it should be possible by the end of this initial phase to develop a strong comprehensive RPDC, linked to strong national and subregional population documentation centres and networks and serving the needs of users through intensified clearinghouse activities.

(b) Publications and public information

64. The anticipated increased activities projected for PIPA will generate several types of publications (reports, technical papers, bibliographies, newsletters, etc.). Additional to formal publications, repackaged information in the form of feature articles, special theme presentations geared at the general public for public information on African population issues are also expected to be prepared. The distribution of requisite publications (both published in-house and outside) will therefore be intensified to accommodate current and potential users whose needs would be closely monitored. Appropriate communication and distribution mechanisms will be instituted to ensure that identified users are continually served with population documentation and literature as needed.

65. In order to implement the above, extrabudgetary resources will be needed to recruit one publications/press information officer and requisite technical and administrative support staff.

(c) Training and advisory services in population information

66. The extent to which PIPA will be able to carry on its operations efficiently and effectively will depend, to a large extent, on the quality of the available manpower to implement given tasks and responsibilities. As indicated in earlier sections of this paper, the poor manpower base constitutes a weak link which has to be considerably improved to ensure a core of personnel capable of understanding, and of adopting new techniques for the handling of population information and data.

67. Accordingly, an intensified training programme which will comprise on-site training, workshops/seminars, attachments and study tours will be pursued as appropriate. Training materials and guides geared at imparting appropriate skills in population documentation will be prepared and made available to support the training programme. The major beneficiaries of the training effort will be personnel at the national centres/networks, where the need is greatest.

68. It is planned, therefore, that at an early stage during the initial phase of the programme, a training seminar/workshop on methodologies for information handling of population information materials, will be organized for interested member States in 1992. Depending on the response to this effort, a similar one will be organized in 1993. Training will cover aspects such as computerization of population documentation, establishment and management of national databases on population, as pertinent to the needs of member States. Apart from these formalized training programmes, on-site training and other informal means will be used to impart the needed skills and expertise to those needing such supports. Opportunities for training will also be sought through the training services offered at ECA by PADIS, as necessary. As and when possible (depending on resources), it will be arranged, through interregional and other similar cooperation, for appropriate manpower in the region to be exposed to more advanced schemes in population information handling outside the African region, especially among global POPIN members.

69. Resources for the training and related advisory services will be sought from interested donor agencies and countries (e.g., IDRC, SIDA, JOICFP, etc.). Training activities will be coordinated by the chief of the Population Information Unit who will identify the training needs and requirements and devise appropriate schemes to address such needs for member States, after due consultations with them.

(d) Regional population information network (POPIN-Africa)

70. A regional population information network made up of all the national and subregional networks, each with its own focal point(s) and participating institutions will be established. The activities/services outlined earlier on will feed the regional information network serving as the props upon which POPIN-Africa will stand. In effect, POPIN-Africa will serve as the concrete demonstration of the region's efforts to organize and share population information. As member States develop their national centres or networks,

they will be invited to participate in the regional decentralized network whose eventual goal will be to facilitate the flow and exchange of population information and data in the region, as recommended by the World Population Plan of Action (WPPA), the KPA, and as exemplified in the global Population Information Network (POPIN), of which POPIN-Africa is a part.

71. It is expected, however, that as member States attain more self-sufficiency in implementing national population activities, the role and functions of the regional coordinating unit or centre will be kept to a minimum (e.g., organizing general regional meetings once so often to bring members of the network together to discuss common issues, for example, information sharing, technical backstopping, training and a regional clearinghouse).

72. During the biennium, the criteria for participation by subregional and national participating nodes will be defined and steps taken to establish strong operational nodes. The Population Information Unit of the Population Division which will serve as the secretariat or coordinating centre for the regional network will monitor the network's development and provide guidance as needed. However, it is perceived that the development of POPIN-Africa as a network will be a long and arduous one, bearing in mind the current levels of population information handling and networking in the African region.

73. In the course of the biennium, therefore, special efforts will be made to better inform member States about the advantages and benefits to be derived through participation in POPIN-Africa. At this stage, it is not anticipated that a full-fledged network, with well developed national and subregional components would have emerged by the end of the biennium. In fact, given present circumstances, the fully operational network could take a minimum of ten years to attain levels where information-sharing and exchange, an improved flow of population information and data; and eventually greater awareness of population issues would have been achieved for the region. The experiences of the Asia-Pacific and the Latin American Regions bear testimony to this slow process in information networking in developing countries.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

74. In view of the foregoing, the following specific recommendations are made:

- (a) To ECA member States
  - (i) member States should aggressively support the strategies and programme outlined above;
  - (ii) member States should institute the machineries at the national level necessary for operationalizing national population information centres/units/networks, as appropriate to their circumstances, as recommended in the KPA in 1984, and as contribution to the regional programme (PIPA) and network (POPIN-Africa);
  - (iii) member States should support ECA's efforts to raise adequate and continued financial and other resources by urging UNFPA, IDRC, CIDA, USAID and other bilateral donors to help the region to attain its ultimate goals. Interested donors should be made to appreciate the critical needs of the African region to develop/strengthen the weak information infrastructures which presently pose problems to building effective and efficient national population information knowledge bases which will serve as inputs to the region's development and population programmes;
  - (iv) member States should authorize the ECA secretariat to initiate steps to absorb some of the budgetary requirements on a progressive regular basis so as to minimize disruptions in the execution of the proposed programme.

- (b) To donor countries/institutions
- (i) should sympathetically view the magnitude of the population information problems of the African region and provide adequate long-term financial and other supports which could help transform the present information backwardness of the region. They should bear in mind, as was noted in the IDRC's Information Strategy for Africa, that "information activities are an aid activity, and should be as much a priority as, for example, research projects"; (15)
  - (ii) UNFPA, either separately or in collaboration with other interested donor institutions, should consider instituting a special fund for Africa, out of which the costs of training and skills development and other critical needs could be met. This would be one of the fastest means to bring the Region to the same levels as those already attained in the other regions. A donors meeting could serve to realize the needed resources;
  - (iii) IDRC, CIDA, USAID, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, JOICFP, the African Development Bank, SIDA and other interested donor countries and agencies are specifically called upon to assist the region's efforts by making appropriate grants and resources available to implement PIPA.

#### V. CONCLUSION

76. It is our firm conviction that the activities outlined above will help bring to reality, a viable, decentralized African regional population information programme that will stimulate national interest in the impact of population issues on economic development, and also create national information knowledge bases and information systems that can adequately respond to the population information needs of national policy and programme decision makers. Through this programme it is anticipated that population information will become more accessible not only to the national centres participating in the network but also to those institutions, individuals and the media that use these resources as inputs in their own work. The regional information network/programme would thus become an effective instrument to help integrate population into development plans and programmes.

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